

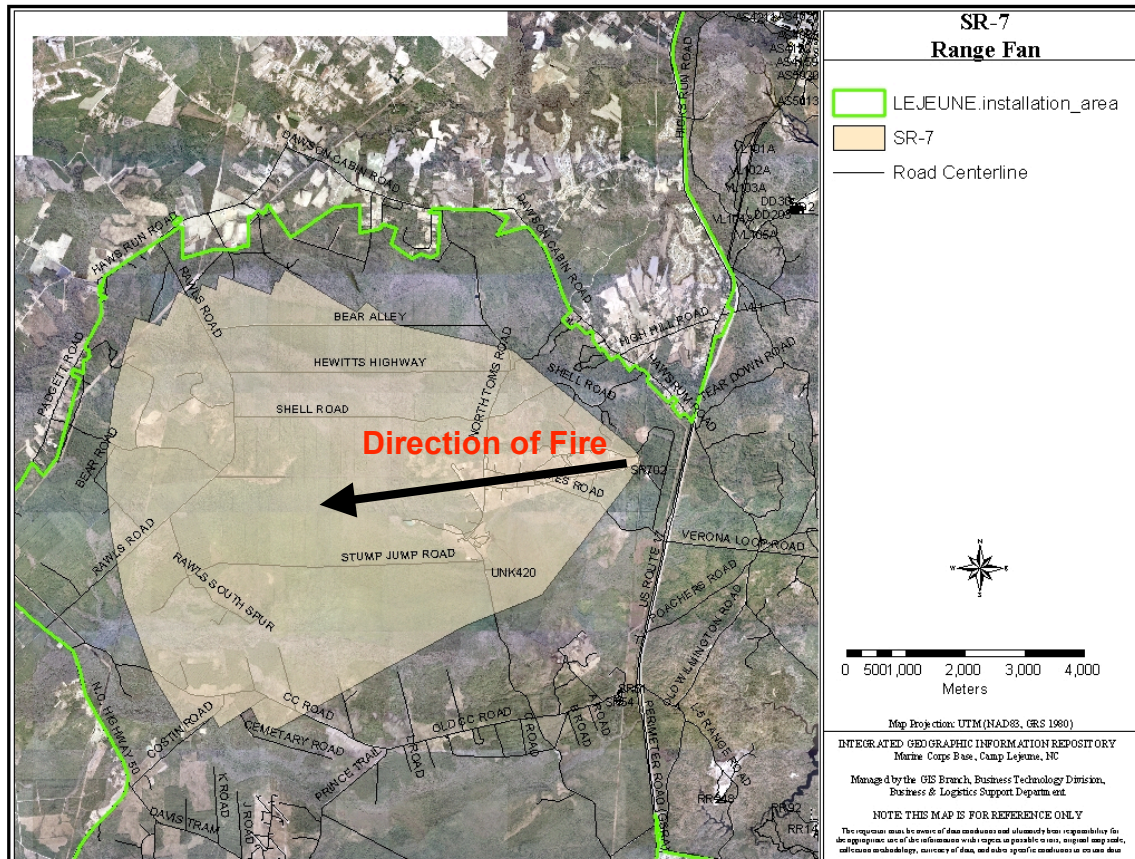
Sandy Run: Reverse Encroachment at Camp Lejeune

By Lenny Siegel
March, 2007

On February 8, 2007 I visited Camp Lejeune Marine Corps Base in North Carolina, one of the two major stateside installations hosting Marine expeditionary forces. I arranged the visit to learn more about the base's groundwater treatment strategies, but while in the area I also followed up on correspondence I had received, about reverse encroachment, from a base neighbor.

In 1992, the Marines acquired the 41,000-acre Great Sandy Run Area (GSRA), primarily from International Paper Company, just across U.S. Highway 17, along the main post's western boundary. Following a series of environmental studies, the Marines began live-fire training there around 1998, and it reportedly added targets in 2005. Marine officials explain that prior to the opening of the range, tank units "had to travel to a number of remote and frequently expensive locations to accomplish essential training."

Sandwiched between the northern edge of the GSRA and the main post, the residents of Verona's High Hill Road are not happy. They complain of intense noise from Marine training. They say it feels like they are under fire, even at night. They believe that the noise or vibrations are damaging their homes.





Home on the range on High Hill Road

Visiting High Hill Road, it's clear that the range buffer zone extends into the small residential neighborhood, with a nearby range fan pointed *away* from the homes. There was no firing while I was there, so I was unable to judge the noise and vibrations for myself.

Some of the families along High Hill Road have lived there since before Camp Lejeune was built during World War II. They are by no means anti-military. In fact, family members are now seeing combat in Iraq or have recently returned from the War. But they find the noise from firing, explosions, and helicopter overflights to be unacceptable. And they consider the Marines' response insufficient.

The Marines, however, say that their noise monitoring shows that noise is not intolerable. When measurements showed that modeling had underestimated the off-site impact of tank guns, they say they moved the tank firing point further away. Smaller weapons are still fired from a site near High Hill Road.

Further, the Marines report a series of studies (including a Joint Land Use Study with Onslow County) and actions (such as the purchase of easements to prevent development along the main post boundary) designed to limit encroachment. They also

report that they bought out some homes when they acquired the property in the early 1990s, and that they had offered similar deals to other residents.



Warning sign on U.S. 17

At least one of the neighbors says he was never offered a buy-out, while another told me that he had not intention of leaving his historic family home.

I am not in a position to determine whether the neighbors are “right,” and it doesn’t matter. Residents with no apparent axe to grind find that Marine training—training that the Marines consider essential—interferes with their lives. Some, at least, don’t want to move. They want the Marines to make less noise.

Most the discussion of encroachment assumes that people are building homes and business up against the fencelines of military bases and ranges, and then they complain. This is usually the case, and the Defense Department and others have developed tools that allow installations such as Camp Lejeune to protect their activities from development-induced conflicts. At Sandy Run, however, the Marines have encroached upon a neighborhood that has been there longer than the base itself. Thus far it appears that the tools for addressing such a problem do not exist.